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ABSTRACT

To examine the relationship between the literary responses and the moral responses of 11-year-old children to selected literary works, a study was conducted involving 28 mature sixth-grade readers. The subjects participated in eight lessons where widely recognized literary works containing moral dilemmas were read. Their responses were given in peer-group interaction. Each lesson plan included five parts: introduction to the work, meaning of terms important for comprehension, purpose for reading the selection, silent reading of the story, and response to the literature. The Purves schema was chosen for analyzing the total response to the literature, and the six Kohlberg stages of moral judgment were used for determining the nature of the moral responses. The findings indicated a relationship between literary responses and moral interpretations. They also showed that the literary responses were within the categories of the Purves schema and the moral responses were within the Kohlberg categories. (FL)

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THE RESPONSE OF SIXTH-GRADE READERS TO SELECTED CHILDREN'S LITERATURE WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO MORAL JUDGMENT

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Moral Education in the Schools

Students in the schools of today will be making decisions for the society of tomorrow. If these students are to make mature moral judgments, and if they are to determine a worthwhile way of life, they must develop a system of values and a discriminating sense of priorities. It is necessary that the schools share with the family and other community institutions in guiding students in moral development during their formative years.

Since the beginning of this century, the schools have received criticism for ineffective moral education of youth. In 1909, John Dewey (4)

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criticised the inadequacy of direct instruction in moral virtues and pointed out "...the futility of assuming that knowledge of right constitutes a guarantee of right doing." Moral education, according to Dewey, should help the child understand life's problems and should appeal to both the emotional and the intellectual sides. He placed strong emphasis on giving attention to aesthetic influence, student response, and student interaction.

Twenty years after Dewey pointed to the inadequacies of moral education, Hartshorne and May (8) demonstrated the ineffectiveness of character education as it was taught at that time. They recommended facing students with increasingly complex situations in group discussions for this kind of instruction.

Following the research of Hartshorne and May, Jean Piaget's study (19) on the moral judgment of children created added interest in this area of development. Piaget emphasized the importance of the child's involvement with groups and the use of language and role-taking in peer-group interaction.

In more recent times, Lawrence Kohlberg's work (11) on moral judgment and his current efforts have been influential in bringing about renewed interest in moral education. After extensive case study work with adolescent boys, he postulated six stages of moral judgment based on children's reasoning in response to moral conflicts and probing questions. Kohlberg contends that moral education can be cognitively stimulated through discussion of hypothetical dilemmas in group interaction and that as the child grows older he becomes more mature in judgment through interacting with others in solving moral problems. During this development, Kohlberg (10)

states that individuals move through stages of moral judgment which fall into three major levels and form a developmental sequence:

I. Preconvention level

Stage 1. The punishment and obedience orientation: a stage of fearful obedience to authority and to rules which are not to be broken.

Stage 2. The instrumental relativist orientation: a stage when right action is that action which satisfies personal needs and sometimes the needs of others.

II. Conventional level

Stage 3. The interpersonal concordance orientation: a stage of conformity to behavior that will meet with approval and please others.

Stage 4. The "law and order" orientation: a stage of respect for duty and authority.

III. Postconventional, autonomous, or principled level

Stage 5. The social contract legalistic orientation: a stage when right action is defined in terms of individual rights and standards and laws agreed upon by society.

Stage 6. The universal ethical principle orientation: a stage when right is defined by conscious and self-chosen principles of ethics that are universal and consistent.

Interest in moral development appears to be growing in the schools. In discussing a national survey of teacher attitude in England, Philip May (13) explains:

> There seems to be a growing body of opinion in favor of devoting more time and effort in the nation's schools to help pupils to achieve greater moral understanding and awareness.

May states that educating the whole child is a popular view of the schools and that "training in moral awareness is a necessary part of his total upbringing." Without this training, he explains, the child's education is incomplete.

Emphasis is placed on the personal development of students by various present-day educators. Arthur Foshay (5) points to the school's responsibility when he states that:

> The function of the educational enterprise is not only to meet social needs. It has to meet the need of the individual for self-fulfillment as well.

Louise Rosenblatt (24) likewise places strong emphasis on the need for giving attention to this area when she writes that:

> No educational process can be considered really relevant if it does not recognize the need to help youth develop a carefully considered sense of humane values.

Many attempts by the schools in moral education have been ineffective, however, education of a different kind can be made available. There is a pressing need for methodology that goes beyond that of the past and gives broader consideration to the intellectual and social development of children. Such programs would be appropriate for communicating with young people and would stimulate reasoning. One way of helping students develop greater sophistication in making moral judgments is through the teaching of selected literature involving moral dilemma.

Literature and Moral Education

Literature, if carefully selected and skillfully taught, can play an important part in helping students develop a sense of priorities, and grow in exercising moral judgment. Too often, however, literature is studied as a body of knowledge or treated as a reading exercise with little attention given to the reader's experiential background, his emotions, and his responses. When this occurs, literature can offer little help in meeting life's problems. Students need effective ways of reading literature with attention given to the moral dimension. It is possible to teach literature in a manner that will involve students personally and that will stimulate growth in moral judgment without destroying the pleasures made possible through literary encounters.

In discussing reading research, Ruth Strang (26) states that "few have been concerned to investigate the positive constructive effects that reading may have on personal development." She reminds teachers of the importance of this area of growth which she says is a frequently neglected purpose of reading instruction.

Strong support is given by many educators to the use of literature in moral education. James Miller (16), in reporting from the Dartmouth Conference, explains that in experiencing a literary work the moral imagination is called forth and that teachers should question, discuss, and explore the moral dimension with students. Brian Crittenden (3) emphasizes the use of literature in moral education when he states:

> There are ... some activities that directly involve substantive moral questions or bear more closely than others on moral development. Among the former, literature, or a significant part of it, exhibits and explores the moral aspects of motives, character, and action.

Maxine Greene (6) discusses the function of imaginative literature in the lives of young people. She concludes that through literary encounters individuals may conceive new plans of living, new forms, and new modes of ordering their lives. Louise Rosenblatt (25) sees literature as a means whereby the reader may explore his own nature, develop aims, and achieve a sense of direction. Sets of ready-made answers to personal problems and ready-made judgments would be ruled out, she states. Instead the reader would work out his own hierarchy of values and would be supplied the impetus to solve problems independently and make judgments intelligently. Through peer interaction, Rosenblatt explains, the students would stimulate one another and would organize responses as they interpret and form judgments.

Response to Literature

If students are to become involved in literary works in a manner that will stimulate moral judgment, teachers must focus on processes which will aid them in experiencing and responding to the literature.

Since the publication of Practical Criticism by I. A. Richards (23), scholars have come to realize the need to learn more about what is involved in interpreting a literary work. This major contribution from a literary critic has been a strong incentive for the study of the

reader's response. Strang (26) stressed the importance of the processes of reading and responding when she stated that:

> ... the most basic and practical research in reading should concentrate on how students approach, perceive, and respond to a selection; how they use previously learned principles; how they remember knowledge; and how they communicate the ideas they gain from their reading.

Through learning about the reader's response, teachers can gain more effective ways of teaching. They learn what a story has communicated and they gain knowledge of reading processes used. Foshay (5) strongly emphasized the importance of the reader's response and the part the teacher must play when he explained:

> ... the basic phenomenon in the teaching of literature is the student's response to a literary work and the teacher's task is to deepen and enrich this response.

James Britton (2), in discussions from the Dartmouth Conference, states that the aim in teaching literature should be to refine and develop responses children make. A response, according to Britton, is an interaction between the literary work and the reader.

In reporting from the Dartmouth Conference, D. W. Harding (7) writes that children of about eleven years of age have probably developed basic structures of adult response to literature. The teacher, Harding contends, cannot leave children to their own unguided perseverance but must lead them "... toward the full range of literary experience that he himself can compass."

Alan Purves (2) has discussed the deep hypothetical structures of literature curricula which he believes operate in education today. One of

The structures which he calls the analytic, is based on the work of literary critics. It places emphasis on the development of students' critical abilities, their comprehension, their analysis, and their response to literary works. Another deep structure of literature discussed by Purves is the "generative," which he states has been influenced by Freud and by John Dewey on literature education. This deals with personal response to what is read. Consideration is given to sincerity, openness, self-concern, and respect for the individuality of others. The generative structure includes concern for analysis of the reader's response; however, it emphasizes the personal growth of a student through reading rather than stressing analytical skills. According to Purves, when this kind of literature curriculum is in evidence, there will be an inclination for " ... dealing with the feelings aroused by the work, its relationship to the reader's life, and its effectiveness in evoking a response." This deep generative structure, it is explained, has been used in relatively few curricula. Reference is made to it in England, New Zealand, and Sweden, as well as to some extent in the United States. Most evidence is found at upper elementary and early secondary levels. Purves states that neither of the structures, analytic nor generative, has been found in a pure state in any country surveyed by the literature committee of The International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement (IEA). This international committee studied literature education in nine countries: Belgium (French speaking and Flemish speaking), Chile, England, Finland, Iran, Italy, New Zealand, Sweden, and the United States.

Purposes and Hypotheses of the Study

The broad purpose of this exploratory study was to examine the relationship between the literary responses and the moral responses of eleven-year-old children to selected literary works. A secondary purpose was to draw implications for the teaching of literature and the development of the children's moral education from the analysis of students' responses.

The major hypothesis of this study was that: A relationship exists between the literary responses of children and their moral interpretations of the literary works. A secondary hypothesis was that: The literary responses of children would be consistently within the categories of the Purves schema, Elements of Writing about a Literary Work: A Study of Response to Literature, (21) and their moral responses would be consistently within the six Kohlberg categories of moral judgment.

Method of Study

To investigate ways that children interact with literature and the nature of their moral reasoning, a plan was devised in this study whereby students would read selected literature, their responses would be evaluated, conclusions would be drawn, and recommendations would be made.

Both a pilot and a field study were conducted with mature sixth-grade readers in a suburban area of a midwestern city of the United

States. Twenty-eight subjects were involved in the field study. Only widely recognized literature containing moral dilemmas was used. The Purves schema was chosen for analyzing the total response to the literature. This schema is divided into 5 categories, 24 subcategories, and 115 elements. For determining the nature of the moral responses, the six Kohlberg stages of moral judgment were used.

Subjects were exposed to eight lessons where literary works were read and response was given in peer-group interaction. Verbatim transcriptions were made from the taped lessons. Reliability coders analyzed the data into idea units through content analysis. More than 4,100 idea units were coded by the two schemas.

Literary works chosen for the study included Newbery Award winners and works listed in Best Books for Children (28). All selections from these books were self-contained chapters:

Author	Literary Work
1. Armstrong, William H. (1)	Sounder, Chapter 1
2. Janeway, Elizabeth (9)	Ivanov Seven, Chapter 7
3. Maupassant, Guy de (12)	"The Necklace"
4. McCord, Jean (14)	"The Cave" from Deep Where the Octopi Lie
5. Ness, Evaline (17)	Josefina February
6. O'Dell, Scott (18)	Island of the Blue Dolphins, Chapter 15
7. Rawlings, Marjorie Kinnan (22)	"The Death of Flag" and "Jody's Return" from The Yearling
8. Ullman, James R. (27)	"The Heights" from Banner in the Sky

Literary materials were selected to provide pleasurable reading experiences and discussions that might increase moral sensitivity. One literary work which is a favorite of children and which involves moral conflict is Banner in the Sky. In the chapter, "The Heights," a young Alpine boy must decide whether to stop and try to save the life of an enemy climber or to continue climbing in an attempt to be the first to reach the top of a coveted mountain peak. A vivid example of responsibility to one's fellow man is shown. Another favorite of children is the Newbery Award winner, Island of the Blue Dolphins. This is a moving account of Karana, an Indian girl, who spent eighteen years alone on an island in the 1800's. In Chapter 15 of this documented story, Karana was faced with a decision of whether to kill a wild dog which was believed to have killed her little brother and which had tried to harm her or to let the dog live when it appeared to be mortally wounded. Both terror and loneliness play a part in this difficult decision. Chapter I of Sounder, another Newbery Award winner, is a deeply moving description of a sharecropper father whose little children were hungry during a cold winter when he was unable to provide food for them. In this dilemma, the father had to decide whether to steal meat for his hungry family or see them suffer for want of food.

In this study attention was focused on the students, their feelings and opinions. The boys and girls were involved in peer-group interaction with each other in free response to the literature. Resolution of moral conflicts in the literary selections was approached from the

dialog of the students. There was active involvement in the group with the investigator speaking as seldom as possible.

The lesson plan for each literary work included five parts:

1. Introduction to the work
2. Vocabulary meaning of terms important for comprehension
3. Purpose for reading the selection
4. Silent reading of the story
5. Response to the literature

Analysis of the Data

In analyzing the data, all categories of the Purves schema were found to be present in the responses: Engagement-Involvement (46.6%), Perception (28.5%), Interpretation (11.8%), Miscellaneous (11.5%), and Evaluation (1.6%). Analysis by the Kohlberg schema showed that Stage 3, "Interpersonal Concordance Orientation," was the dominant stage of moral judgment (71%).

The Spearman Rank-Order Correlation Formula was used to determine relationships of categories of literary responses and moral interpretations. The following positive correlations, significant at the 5 percent level, were obtained: (1) Stage 3 and Engagement-Involvement, .55; (2) Stage 3 and Perception, .59; (3) Stage 3 and Interpretation, .58.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Results of the study confirmed the hypotheses. A relationship was found between literary responses and moral interpretations; literary responses were within the categories of the Purves schema; and moral responses were within the Kohlberg categories of moral judgment.

Sixth-grade children have the ability to analyze literature. The degree of comprehensiveness of their interaction with literary works and the nature of their moral reasoning were revealed through their responses. Response was offered over a wide range of subcategories with some frequency in all but four of the twenty-four subcategories of the Purves schema; however, need for literature study in the elementary school was implied since numerous areas of response showed low frequency. From this study and inter-study comparisons which were made, it was concluded that children in the age range of eleven years tend to rank lower in Interpretation and Evaluation than in Engagement-Involvement and Perception. Both Interpretation and Evaluation deserve more attention in teaching. Some children in the study showed very low or no frequency of response in moral judgment implying need for attention in this area. The positive correlations by the Spearman Rank-Order Formula indicate that all three categories of literary response are involved in making moral judgment: Engagement-Involvement, Perception, and Interpretation.

From the study it was concluded that peer-group interaction is a satisfactory means of obtaining responses to literary works and a means of resolving moral conflict. Through personal involvement in the literature and through reasoning, moral judgment was stimulated.

The following recommendations were made:

1. That literature be taught throughout the elementary grades.
2. That moral education be given attention in the schools from early childhood on through the years.
3. That teachers acquire more knowledge of how to guide children in reading and responding to literature in their teacher education programs.
4. That teachers use a schema to evaluate children's responses to literature to find areas that are weak or missing.
5. That teachers use a schema to evaluate children's moral responses.
6. That teachers direct attention of children to areas of Engagement-Involvement, Perception, and Interpretation when involving them in literature which includes moral dilemmas. Because of the relationship between these categories of literary response and moral judgment, attention to these areas makes it possible to deepen response and foster moral development at the same time.
7. That further research be conducted in these areas.

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